Perceptions, interpretations, and responses to the same stimulus not only vary from individual to individual, but also vary from time to time within the same individual. The viewer watching a cartoon or a purely fictional drama may be aware of and acknowledge the fantasy nature of the stimuli, but through primitive unconscious identification processes he may respond psychologically and physiologically as if the stimuli are real and personally involve him. States of comfort or discomfort, pleasure or pain, and even verbal communications or participating movements may be evoked.

It is possible that stimuli from a television screen in a box occupying a small portion of a room arouse neurophysiological patterns similar to or different from those aroused in interpersonal experiences with real people. We do not yet know how the neurophysiological experience associated with witnessing a fight between two real people would compare with the neurophysiological experience associated with witnessing filmed images of that fight on a television screen.

Responses of children and adults

Genrally, infants and young children are less able than older persons to distinguish stimuli which are products of fantasy from those which are products of reality. Most children are more apt than older people to respond emotionally and physically, as well as ideationally, to their own fantasies and to the fantasies presented to them as if they were reality.

In varying degrees adults, too, may experience reactivation of patterns which were more prominent during childhood. Many elements in the emotional experiences of adults are associated with emotional experiences from their childhood, and it is not uncommon for adults to enjoy relationships, interests, and activities of which they were fond during childhood. Indeed, much of the content communicated through the media, including television, engages the "child part" of adults as well as their mature aspects.

Parental influence

In normal parent-child interaction, the differentiating of make-believe from real is a complex and extended process at best. In the television-child setting, the task is further complicated because the child is often left largely to his own devices. To him, the difference between film clips of actual combat or a real riot, and dramatic portrayals of similar conflicts, may not always be clear. Commericals may further blur distinctions since they often consist of fantasy about real things.

If fictional violence continues to appear in television entertainment, should special steps be taken to assist children in identifying it as fiction? Can fictional violence on television play a constructive role as a

psychological safety valve which vents socially unacceptable hostility by offering vicarious experience to some persons? Can televised violence stimulate psychological inhibitory mechanisms in some viewers which reduce their likelihood of imitating that behavior? Does televised violence instigate or facilitate for some viewers release of aggressive or violent impulses? Does a high concentration of violence in televised content convey impressions of permissiveness toward or expectations of violent behavior to some persons? How do influences from family, school, religion, laws, neighborhood environment, peers, genetic, physiological and cultural factors interact with various television viewing experiences? Do the images on a television screen provide a "fantasy" stimulus quite unlike that provided by real people in the room? Which persons tend to differentiate and which tend to confuse fantasy and reality? Are these behavioral effects beneficial or detrimental, prosocial or antisocial, adaptive or maladaptive?

These are some of the many questions which have motivated systematic inquiry and scientific research on the effects of television on social behavior.

WHAT THE CONTENT OF TELEVISION REFLECTS

Television content inevitably reflects the values, the points of view, and the expectation of audience response held by those involved in the production process.

Drama, light or serious, documentaries, "specials," variety and music programs, and news are quite different types of format and in many respects involve quite different considerations. All, however, require the making of decisions as to what will be presented from the voluminous amount of potential material. The values reflected in these decisions are no less relevant because they are generally unarticulated. The decisions made take on importance because all these varieties of television fare can structure the audience member's relationship to reality. To varying extents and in various ways, they can engage conscience, modify or mobilize opinion, and challenge or confirm beliefs.

Audience response to news programs, for example, depends to a considerable degree upon the televised content, and this depends in part on the selection and editing process. Selection of an emotionally charged part of a speech and omission of the context in which it was given might increase the audience involvement but also might contribute to false beliefs by offering an unbalanced view.

Suggestible persons may be strongly influenced or even exploited by the ideas and advice offered through television and other media. Other viewers may be freed from restrictive ideas and false beliefs to which they have been bound. Media may be used to promote conflict or to resolve it. The moderator of a panel show, for example, may help

representatives of different schools of thought to fight with one another or to find common interests, to collaborate, synchronize, and harmonize their contributions.

Stereotypes

In addition to violence, an area of major concern has been television's potentiality for perpetuating, reinforcing, or modifying social stereotypes about groups defined by such criteria as sex, ethnic background, and social class.

Many children in the United States, especially those in big cities, have never met an American Indian. But American children have had endless hours of experience with "Indians" who ride horses across the plains, stalk wagon trains, and raid camps of white soldiers. Much of what American children "know" about American Indians may well have been derived from watching television dramas and movies rerun on television.

For many years, blacks were seen usually as servants, slaves, or buffoons, less often as athletes or fighters, almost never as clergymen, physicians, teachers, attorneys, or policemen. Black Americans protested that such stereotypic portrayals conditioned other Americans to think of them as inferior to whites. This protest has now been heard, and vigorous efforts are now being made to present movie and television dramas in which black actors appear in a broad diversity of roles.

Since television may play a role in shaping opinion and attitudes, it is important to pay attention to which persons, groups, and interests are presented in a favorable light and which are presented unfavorably. Televised content can suggest who may be considered benign and who may be considered a threat to society.

The responsibility of decision-making

Decisions made by persons at various levels in the television industry determine what is broadcast, when it is broadcast, and how what is broadcast is treated—from point of view to camera angle.

The media may offer an avenue of expression for a few or for many. Unfortunately, the powerful and the powerless, the wealthy and the poor, the influential elites and nonelites do not have equal access to the television cameras and microphones, and the impact of television may be differentially felt. In general, the powerful, influential, and elite have opportunity to initate and control the content and uses of television in ways that the powerless, the poor, and the nonelite do not. In these interactions one party's interests are often supported while the interests of other parties are sacrificed. This places an especially heavy responsibility on those who determine which aspects of reality shall be given the special salience bestowed by television treatment.

DEFINITIONS AND DIMENSIONS OF VIOLENCE

The possible effect of televised violence on the behavior and attitudes of children is the major focus of this research program. The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (1969) in examining the history of American society made these points:

America has always been a relatively violent nation. Considering the tumultuous historical forces that have shaped the United States, it would be astonishing were it otherwise.

Since rapid social change in America has produced different forms of violence with widely varying patterns of motivation, aggression, and victimization, violence in America has waxed and waned with the social tides. The decade just ending, for example, has been one of our most violent eras—although probably not the most violent.

Exclusive emphasis in a society on law enforcement rather than on a sensible balance of remedial action and enforcement tends to lead to a decaying cycle in which resistance grows and becomes ever more violent.

For remedial social change to be an effective moderator of violence, the changes must command a wide measure of support throughout the community. Official efforts to impose change that is resisted by a dominant majority frequently prompt counterviolence.

Finally, Americans have been, paradoxically, a turbulent people but have enjoyed a relatively stable republic. Our liberal and pluralistic system has historically both generated and accommodated itself to a high level of unrest, and our turmoil has reflected far more demonstration and protest than conspiracy and revolution.

Within these broad conclusions, the Commission examined the history of violence, with attention to both individual and group violence and to effects of television and other media upon these. At least two things are clear from reading the Violence Commission report, as well as the primary references on violence and aggression which the Commission used. The first is that violence has characterized our society throughout its history, and the second is that there is no simple or universal explanation of the causes of violence. In fact, there is not even a clear consensus about what constitutes violence.

What is "violent?"

The character of an act does not, by itself, define whether the act is violent. The effect, the social context, the moral framework, the degree of legitimization, and the amount and kinds of group endorsement of the act are very relevant to the definition of violence in the real world. For example, while many societies sanction parents' use of physical force to control and train their children, the same force, employed by other persons in a different context, might be defined as violence. Although their use of force is not so widely permitted, children often employ force in

their dealings with other persons—especially other children—and in their expression of feelings. Over time, most individuals will internalize their society's moral codes and mold their behavior accordingly.

Whether or not the use of physical force will be defined as violence depends upon one's perspective and upon the context, as well as upon the nature of the act. The recipients of forceful action generally define such action as violent more readily than do initiators of the action. Thus:

- —The same act may be considered violent under some circumstances and not under others.
- —The same act may be judged as violent by one person and not by another.
- —The same act may be generally accepted and labeled nonviolent when committed by one person but may be generally rejected as violent when committed by another.
- —The same violent act may be accepted at some ages but not all others, or may be accepted among males but not among females.
- —The same violent act may be rejected if one initiates it but may be approved as self-protection against another's attack.
- —Violence may be accepted if it is deemed necessary to protect a person, a property, or an important belief.
- —Destroying or hurting another by psychological or verbal means, which are generally more subtle than physical actions, will often not be considered as violence.
- —The ethics of violence may be blunt; line-of-duty violent acts of soldiers and police may be acceptable.
- —The ethics of violence may be more subtle. It may be acceptable to hit back, but not in the groin or in the eye.
- —An act by a person we like or idealize is less apt to be considered violent than the same act by a person we dislike or denigrate.
- —Violence to right a wrong may be acceptable by an acknowledged official but not by ordinary citizens, some of whom may even be expected to accommodate to injustice.

Defining aggression

Throughout this report the terms "aggression" and "violence" are employed almost always in reference to antisocial behavior. We acknowledge that this usage is neither comprehensive nor precise. However, this usage is so common that its meaning is communicated easily.

The word "aggression" has generally been associated with antisocial or destructive implications. Within psychoanalytic theory, on the other hand, aggression refers to the mobilization, organization, and application of energy to a task which may be constructive or destructive, prosocial or antisocial.

In his review of literature on effects of media portrayals of violence, Weiss (1969) noted the difficulty of arriving at a generally accepted conceptualization of aggression. A vast and varied array of behaviors may be considered aggressive, depending upon effects, upon intent, upon context, upon associated feelings and fantasies, and upon other factors. There is no aggreement either among lay persons or among scientists about how fantasized aggression, verbal aggression, and physical aggression may be compared. Nor is there agreement about what constitutes an aggressive act in real-life experiences or about the degree to which behavior measured in a laboratory is analogous to that in a naturalistic setting. Aggression against an inanimate object is not always accepted as the functional equivalent of aggression against an animate one. Would the inanimate object have been struck if it could hit back? Is aggressive behavior in play a functional equivalent of aggressive behavior with intent to harm?

Sociopolitical aspects of violence and aggression

When we consider behavior within a societal context, the meaning of concepts such as "violence," "aggression," "order," and "disorder" is defined by sociopolitical processes. Similarly, decisions about the particular manner in which "violent" acts are to be handled—for example, with a "show of force" or the actual use of "deadly force" by officials —are also essentially sociopolitical in nature.

In a staff report to the Violence Commission, Skolnick (1969) discussed the political and public policy aspects of defining, labeling, and handling violence. The kind of acts which are classified as "violent," as well as those which are not so classified, vary according to who provides the definition and who has the superior resources for disseminating and enforcing his definitions. The legislative process is involved in the formulation and enactment of criminal laws and of specific penalties for engaging in behavior so defined and officially prohibited. For example, the behavioral act of killing another person does not automatically nor even necessarily constitute murder. If the killing can officially be viewed as justified or in self-defense, for example, it will not be labeled as murder. Similarly, the young man setting fire to a Vietnamese hut may be considered a dutiful citizen and soldier; the same man burning a grocery store in New York or Chicago may be viewed as a dangerous criminal engaged in arson and related crimes.

Almost every society, including primitive societies, legitimizes for the sake of its own maintenance some aggression and violence against internal and external threats. Every society has inconsistent norms and mores. Every society talks a better, purer, more noble game than it plays.

Aggression and violence are always the legitimized privilege of authority, whether it be within the setting of the family. within a tribe. or within a nation.

Some aggression and violence have been an outcome of disagreements between individuals or groups over cherished values and beliefs which, in themselves, are conflicting at times. In a competitive society, strong motivations toward productivity and rewards may lead to high standards of living for some people and exploitation, suffering, and unfairness for others. Those who focus their attention upon the productivity and the high standard of living have a legitimate basis for their approval of this process; those who focus attention upon the exploitation and unfairness have a legitimate basis for their disapproval.

People often accommodate and adjust for long periods of time to damage, injury, or psychological trauma caused by such inequities as crippling discrimination on the basis of socioeconomic status or race. Severely destructive effects may be tolerated, but they are rarely defined as violence if they are brought about slowly enough, within a framework of accepted values and laws, and by group rather than individual action. Such legitimized and processed violence may have a large number of victims reflected in death rates, morbidity rates, vulnerability to exploitation, and other forms of human suffering.

Neglect is not considered violence even if it results in death. Sudden damage to an individual or an object is generally recognized as violence while slow, erosive damage is apt to be perceived as violence only by the victim. In like manner, one who holds, envelops, or imprisons another against his will seldom perceives the violence experienced by the one who is held.

Dimensions of violence and the television industry

The television industry, in the production of programs with violent content, variously deals with or neglects these definitions and dimensions. The length of programs restricts the extent to which complexities can be developed. The beliefs, values, and definitions which exist in the minds of television decision-makers produce additional limitations in the conceptualization of violence on television. The economics of mass media lead to the presentation of violence in such a way and in such dimensions as suit the tastes of a highly heterogeneous audience. Additionally, if content is presented which is not accepted to influential per sons and important public officials, problems of other kinds may develop. Thus, in many ways the practicalities of continually balancing relationships with the audience, with public officials, with advertisers, and with numerous other interests foster limitations of various kinds on television content. Unless persuasive influences develop in new directions,

the present patterns seem likely to continue, as a result of both conscious and unconscious psychological and social pressures.

DEFINING VIOLENCE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

Any comprehensive consideration of the issue of violence in television content must take into account as many dimensions and complexities of violence as possible, not confine itself to narrowly restricted aspects.

When violence must be defined for research purposes, however, it inevitably is stated in a restricted form. In his analysis of television content in research sponsored in this program, Gerbner (1971b) points out:

> Violence connotes a great variety of physical and mental violations, emotions, injustices, and transgressions of social and moral norms. For this study violence was defined in its strictest physical sense as an arbiter of power. Analysts were instructed to record as violent only 'the overt expression of physical force against others or self, or the compelling of action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed.' The expression of injurious or lethal force had to be credible and real in the symbolic terms of the drama. Humorous and even farcical violence can be credible and real, even if it has a presumable comic effect. But idle threats, verbal abuse or comic gestures with no real consequences were not to be considered violent. The agent of violence could be any sort of creature, and the act could appear to be accidental as well as intentional. All characters serve human purposes in the symbolic realm, and accidents or even 'acts of nature' occur only on purpose in drama.

An example of what investigators considered "violent" filmed material is a specially assembled 45-minute videotape used by Greenberg and Gordon (1971c), which the authors described as follows:

> This 45-minute tape contained 75 separate scenes of violence which varied in length from five to 120 seconds. All violent sequences were scenes in which characters physically harmed themselves or another person (e.g., hitting or shooting), overtly intended such harm (e.g., shooting but missing), or physically damaged some inanimate object (e.g., smashing furniture). Scenes of yelling or shouting were also recorded as examples of verbal aggression.

Liebert and Baron (1971) employed three-and-one-half-minute action sequences from the television series *The Untouchables*. Stein and Friedrich (1971) used 12 20-minute episodes of *Batman* or *Superman* as an "aggressive" television film diet in their study of four-year-olds. This illustrates the principle that violence is operationally defined by the choice of specific stimulus material.

One researcher, however, defined media violence in a very different and much broader way. Clark (1971) argues that violence can be almost imperceptible and slow as well as sudden, and that the media can *be* violent as well as *convey* violence. In Clark's view, since television is a way of learning about the worth of one's self and others, the medium does

violence to blacks and other minorities by portraying them in ways that lower their self-esteem. Television violence, in his terms, is the "slow mental disintegration" that "the mass media commit by virtue of their effects on the black self-image." As a result, Clark studies identification with television characters, because he believes that identification is the psychological process through which the violence he attributes to television is inflicted and is an index of the harmful effects of television and other influences on the wellbeing of minorities.

While violence defined in this manner can produce destructive effects and many victims, these effects result from the use of psychological force rather than physical force. Operational definitions of violence and aggression generally emphasize specific physical actions which cause discomfort or injury to a person or damage to property.

Chapter 3

Some Problems of Research on the Impact of Television

A number of recurring questions arise in the process of reviewing what is known about the impact of television. Representatives of many diverse disciplines are trying to understand and formulate the effects of media experience upon human behavior. In each discipline there are diverse schools which rely upon different theories and different methods. They exist in relatively separated and isolated compartments.

In addition to these general problems, a number of specific research questions must be addressed before even tentative conclusions on the nature of television's effects can be advanced: What are the special problems associated with studying television's impact in childhood? What is the nature of the television stimulus? What are the strategies for investigating the impact of television? How much can these studies tell us about the viewer's behavior in response to television?

BEHAVIOR IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

A large number of studies conducted over the past two decades, concerned with the years of immaturity in human beings and other species, have convinced specialists in child development that the early period of life is critically important. These studies support the age-old observation that "as the twig is bent, so the tree will grow." The child's learning during the first five or six years sets the foundation for lifelong patterns of behavior and for further learning. Attitudes and values, as well as habits

35

of thinking and reacting to other people, are set during this formative period. Child psychologists and child psychiatrists think of the young child as especially susceptible to influence (whether for good or for ill) during the years of his life when he is vitally dependent on other individuals for his very survival and growth.

Young children are naturally curious and eager to learn all they can from life. Television is one potentially important source of knowledge, and by age two or three most American children have begun to watch and listen to television regularly (Schramm, Lyle, and Parker, 1961). However, most research studying the effects of television on children has not captured children's earliest experiences with television; instead, studies have concentrated on television's influence on school-age children and on adolescents. This is unfortunate; the years before the fifth birthday, when the child is especially open to new learning and new experiences, should be a period when television viewing might be especially influential. Earlier studies (e.g., Bandura, Ross, and Ross, 1963) have documented that three-, four-, and five-year-old children imitate specific acts (including aggressive acts) which they have observed on film, at least in experimental circumstances. In the present series of studies, which will be described below, Stein and Friedrich (1971) were again able to document indications of television's impact as early as age three.

A young child's reaction to television is potentially quite different from that of an adult. A child has only a limited range of past experience and does not have a well-established set of conceptual categories for clarifying his perceptual experiences.

Many adults assume that because children catch the fun of some adult humor, they regularly operate on a higher level of sophistication than they actually do. If the stories or scenes which appeal to each age group were explored, one would probably discover that the child relates to humor which has a concrete rather than an abstract theme. The thinking of the three- and four-year-old is not logic as the adult sees it. At that age children are still free-associating through the day. The evolution of their thinking processes has not yet reached the stage where they voluntarily or involuntarily classify, sort, select, and organize information except in very concrete and immediate terms. Certain children of superior intelligence who have had help with language and thinking in the family context do sometimes indicate that they can at least follow simple logical arguments, and their conversation often appears to make good sense to adults. However, the conversation of the overwhelming number of three- and four-year-old children is not always sensible in adult contexts. In the same vein, the young television viewer often is unable to follow the theme of even a simple story (Klapper, 1969; Leifer and Roberts, 1971). It is unlikely that young children will understand the relatively complex motivations for and consequences of the behavior demonstrated by the television actor.

DEFINING THE TELEVISION STIMULUS

In order to assess the impact of television, we must clearly understand the nature of the television stimulus. A number of questions about television content, which raise important issues for research in this field, have been raised in earlier writings (e.g., Siegel, 1969).

To what degree is the symbolic language of television different from or similar to other "languages" such as those used in interpersonal communication, live drama, serious music, and such? Is the "language" of television entertainment fare taken seriously by audiences, or does it carry within itself a heavy discounting element because of the potential artificiality of its excesses of cordiality, good humor, sincerity, intimacy, and violence? Do audiences carefully attend to the symbols of television entertainment, or do these symbols merely reflect on irrelevant dimensions of life and thus require nothing more than superficial or casual attention?

Is the language of television especially "vivid," as some observers suggest? While television may be more vivid than other media like newspapers, comic books, or radio, how does it compare to listening to one's father or to a live concert or to seeing a professional football game in a stadium? And if the language of television is indeed more "vivid," is it necessarily more "effective" than, let us say, reading a fairy tale or listening to a stereo recording of *Peter and the Wolf*?

Can distinctions between "pure" entertainment content and "pure" information content be made from content analyses alone? Much research has shown that what may be information content for some viewers may serve as entertainment content for others. Consequently, it is not easy to separate entertainment content from other types of content simply on the basis of an *a priori* classification scheme. Typically, television viewers in American homes are exposed to a complex mix of news, information, educational materials, advertising, propaganda, and entertainment fare. Any concern about the totality of reactions by viewers to television fare must also be concern about the totality of the symbolic stimuli to which they are exposed.

A good deal of the "violent" content found in selected televised entertainment programs refers to times, places, characters, and events that are far removed from the actual life-space of the viewers; the programs are, in truth, fantasies which have no direct explicit application to contemporary life (e.g., the "western," "science fiction," "ghost and horror stories," the "period/costume drama"), but may in fact be symbolic of contemporary life. An interesting question arises here—namely, how and to what degree do content variables like "time of action," "type of action," and "place of action" that are removed from the current scene relate to contemporary audience reactions to this fare? Does this "distancing" of symbols serve as another discounting factor so that the view-

er dismisses the materials as reflecting "just another story?" Or do these variables "wash out" and allow viewers to develop personal analogs for themselves regardless? Perhaps even more important questions are whether the young viewer perceives this "distancing," and, if so, how this perception relates to the likelihood that the child will adopt the televised behavior as a guide for his actions.

What precisely constitutes portrayals of violence on television? In one approach, mentioned in Chapter 2, violent content is described in terms of discrete manifestations of physical aggressive behavior units in television programs. The unit of measure recorded in these studies is a specific act of observable behavior (e.g., punching, kicking, shooting). Each manifest act is generally given equal weight; the acts are summed up to reflect "violent" content as such. In another approach, it is suggested that aggressive behavior in television portrayals consists of an event made up of overt or covert aggression within the context of other nonaggressive events, or of an interpersonal tactic wherein aggressive behavior of some sort (rather than a nonaggressive tactic) is used to gain a specific end. Consequently, this unit of measure is the totality of the event or situation which includes the specific "aggressive" tactic employed. Cutting across these two approaches are considerations of (1) whether the events and interpersonal tactics are reasonably capable of being adopted by a viewer quite literally, or (2) whether the portrayed event or tactic is symbolic and can only be adopted in keeping with the viewer's individual mode of expression of aggressive behavior.

RESEARCH STRATEGIES

In order to explore the possible influences on subsequent social behavior of exposure to portrayals of violence on television, most of the studies in this program used one of two modes of investigation. One method can be described as applying the concepts and data-gathering techniques of field social survey research; the other, as applying the concepts and data-gathering techniques of the controlled laboratory experiment.

Because the techniques used in either data-gathering method—survey or laboratory experiment—have critical bearing on the outcome of research, both methods will be given detailed attention as this report progresses.

At this point it suffices to note that the distinctions between these two methods lie fundamentally in the manner in which data are gathered, rather than in the way they are ultimately analyzed and interpreted.

Essentially, the social survey seeks to determine the relationships among and between variables as they may be distributed in relatively large samples either of a universe or of specific subpopulations. In contrast, the laboratory experimental approach calls for isolating one variable and testing its influence on the behaviors of small selected groups.

One of the least complex experimental designs usually is composed of (1) a group (i.e., experimental group) which is exposed to a stimulus and (2) a group matched for similarities with the experimental group (i.e., control group) which is not so exposed.

Implications of research

Understanding the relationship between research results and free-ranging human behavior has been a persistent difficulty in attempts to apply scientific findings to the problems of daily life. Surveys and other correlational studies are usually unable to clarify sequential or causal relationships; experiments, while elucidating causality, usually require a simulation of certain behaviors in an experimental setting. Thus, each research strategy has some limitations.

In experimental studies of the impact of television in early childhood, the problem is even more acute, according to some observers, because the most definitive evidence comes from experiments in special playrooms which are somewhat strange to the child. When a child views television, he usually watches in his own home surrounded by his family; critics suggest that the things the child learns and the behavior he demonstrates in this setting are quite different from what he learns and how he behaves in a special playroom.[1] Some specialists concerned with the growth and development of children, on the other hand, believe that there is no clear distinction among settings for studying a child's behavior. They maintain that, for young children, the playground, the nursery school, and the playroom with a television set are not artificial but rather are part of the child's natural daily environment. Therefore, they hold, the behavior demonstrated in these settings can indeed be considered representative of the child's free-ranging behavior.

Suspension of norms for behavior. The attempt to study the social effects of viewing television drama might be restated as the attempt to study the real-life behavior consequences of vicarious experience. This relationship between a "fantasy stimulus" and a "reality response" raises some important questions for research. Certain aspects of this issue were discussed in the preceding chapter; however, further aspects have implications for research methodology.

In culture after culture, for example, societies have exhibited games, entertainments, and ceremonies during which established norms for

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[1]The playroom in which a child psychologist conducts his or her research with young children is usually a small private room furnished with a table and chairs, a rug on the floor, and various toys. When the research concerns television, the furnishings include a television receiver. Usually there is a one-way vision mirror on the wall through which observers in the adjoining room may watch the child and make records of his behavior without intruding on it. Any technical monitoring apparatus—e.g., a tape recorder—is housed in the adjacent observation room. The playroom itself is planned to be cheerful, uncomplicated, and inviting, to provide a comfortable setting for the child.

behavior are suspended; special codes which permit encroachments on norms or taboos come into force for a limited period. The requirement of truthfulness is suspended while the storyteller relates tales of youthful adventure. The prohibition of physical violence is suspended during games of contact sports. Norms for behavior between the sexes are somewhat relaxed during the Mardi Gras. In all such cases, the spectator, for a well-defined time period, enters into a moratorium on norms during which vicarious experience of otherwise unacceptable behavior is not only permitted but encouraged.

This pattern may be referred to as an "entertainment scenario," in contrast to a "reality scenario" in which a person is expected to order his behavior in compliance with approved norms for everyday living. While the entertainment scenario tends to indulge impulse, the reality scenario tends to inhibit it.

The entertainment scenario involves the assumption that socialization is well enough established that those involved can agree that during their interval of vicarious experience, everyday norms are *suspended*, not abolished. For example, a father and son at a football game may join in shouting to their team to commit all manner of violence against the opposing team (entertainment scenario), and the son may have a little trouble "settling down" immediately after the game. But they both know that, once they have returned home, the son's interactions with his sister must conform to a completely different set of ground rules (reality scenario) than those which were appropriate on the playing field.

Everyday experience suggests, at the same time, that the mood established in the entertainment scenario tends to persist. The demands of the reality situation and individual personality characteristics probably influence the speed with which one moves from the entertainment scenario back to the reality scenario. The strength of the stimulus may also be a factor.

For measurement to be fully valid, these potential differences between the reality scenario and the entertainment scenario need to be taken into consideration. Unfortunately, there is little information available that bears directly on this issue.

Limitations of research

In some research instances, it is necessary to alter or modify some aspects of the behavior studied. In research dealing with the impact of televised violence on children's aggressive behavior, the requirement that aggressive behavior be simulated is particularly important. No investigator would place a child in a setting where he could clearly harm either himself or another child. Instead, he might substitute inanimate objects like large dolls for live persons as the object of aggression. Thus, experiments on the impact of televised violence have generally focused

on indicators of interpersonal aggression, such as the child's report of his feelings and attitudes about hurting another person or his behavior in striking inanimate objects. Moreover, as Weiss (1969) points out in his review, "the testing situation is designed to give the impression that aggression is permissible if not encouraged; in the shock studies,[2] aggression is required and only the degree of aggression can vary." These considerations, as Weiss indicates, raise questions about "the propriety of referring to the responses used in the research as aggressive behavior."

There are, of course, other aspects of research which must be understood in attempting to translate the experimental findings to daily life. Where the study of children's television viewing behavior is concerned, one aspect which must be studied is the child's overall psychological state for the day as well as for the moment. If he has been getting into mischief all day long, or if his caretaker has been irritable, or if he has not been feeling well, the sight of people being attacked and punished on television could have quite a different effect on him than the same scene might on a day when he had been generally successful and when his coping skills were strong.

To some extent, these variations in background conditions can be taken into account by a research design which uses an adequate number of subjects and randomly assigns these subjects to the various treatment conditions. But other factors enter in when we try to extrapolate the results from experimental studies to real life. When a young child is feeling strong, confident, and cared-for, he is not so prone to confuse fantasy with reality and decide that the world is too dangerous for him to cope with. The two-, three-, or four-year-old child whose mother is in the house may watch punishment and aggression on television with more detachment or aplomb than when she is not present and when he is uncertain that he is being well cared for.

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[2]Weiss refers to experiments in which subjects are directed to administer ostensible electric shocks.

Chapter 4

Television Content

Studies of television program content leave no doubt that among entertainment programs, violence figures prominently. There is also much violence in news programs, but the research on television content has focused mainly on dramatized entertainment programs. This focus, in itself, precluded a complete examination of the full spectrum of television and social behavior.

Television offers a remarkable variety of program content, including news, sports, music, politics, education, discussion programs, and worship services. These types of programs are scarcely mentioned in our studies, nor is any attempt made to explore their constructive contributions to American life. It is taken for granted that television programming is on the whole consonant with modal interests and values. Indeed, if it were not, it could not survive, since it is dependent on voluntary audiences.

There are few places in the United States where people receive as few as two television channels, and there are probably few individuals who, if they review the weekly schedules, will fail to find programming to suit their tastes. If they or their children spend large amounts of time viewing television, they are under no requirement to do so. The emergence of public television and of cable systems promises further extension of alternatives, further diversity of offerings.

It is widely believed that television increases children's vocabulary and extends their horizons (Steiner, 1963; Witty, 1966; Lyle and Hoffman, 1971a). At the same time, and precisely because of the enormous popularity of television programming, there is concern about the possibility of negative effects on children. This concern relates particularly to fictional violence in entertainment programs. It is primarily this concern that motivated government sponsorship of the present project, and our studies are almost exclusively addressed to its exploration.

43

VIOLENCE: SENT AND RECEIVED

As we noted in a previous chapter, violence takes many forms. There is verbal violence, fist fighting, violence with weapons, and there is the slapstick violence among cartoon characters. There is the violence of nature in storms, in fires, in hunting by predatory animals. There is socially approved violence (when the sheriff defeats the criminal) and disapproved violence (when the criminal holds up the storekeeper). For reasons that are not clear, it is customary, in studies of violence in entertainment programs, to exclude the violence of football, basketball, hockey, baseball, boxing, automobile racing, skating derbies, wrestling, rodeos.

The portrayal of violence cannot be assumed to have a one-to-one relationship with the perception of violence nor with the response to it. Although we know of no studies that would justify generalizing on this point, there are reports that individual children may experience distress at the televised portrayal of a pet being wounded but apparently feel no such reaction to what many adults would consider more extreme forms of violence.

To speak of violence in television programs, then, is to speak of many things. Nevertheless, a study by Greenberg and Gordon (1971b) indicates a high'degree of agreement among ratings by 303 adult audience members and 43 television critics as to which television programs are most violent. Particularly interesting is their finding that, though half of their audience sample was given a definition of violence and half was not, the rank ordering of the ratings by the two audience groups led to nearly identical lists of "most violent" programs. The definition was: "By violence, I mean how much fighting, shooting, yelling or killing there usually is in the show."

The 43 television critics were provided with this same definition of violence. Their ratings corresponded closely with those of the sample of audience members. The critics and the public agreed as to the 20 series they considered most violent.

VIOLENCE IN PROGRAMS

The most thorough study of violent content in television entertainment programs, or segments of programs, "that tell a story" has been conducted by Gerbner (1971b). His definition of an instance of violence is "the overt expression of physical force against others or self, or the compelling of action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed." In addition to such acts as fighting, shooting, or killing, Gerbner included humorous and farcical acts, accidents, and acts of nature, so long as they appeared to be "credible and real."

Gerbner's most recent study includes findings from his two earlier studies of the same sort. thus providing comparisons between findings in 1967, 1968, and 1969. These studies are primarily devoted to the enumeration and classification of violent incidents by trained coders who watched and coded videotapes of selected network programs for one week in October for each of the three years. He points out that his study is an analysis of program content. not of effects.

Because Gerbner's findings have been inaccurately cited in several instances as referring to all network programs during the week of each year he studied. clarification of his data base is appropriate. The hours studied in Philadelphia in 1967 are shown in the following table. The hours studied in 1968 and 1969 are similar but not identical:

	ABC	CBS	NBC
Sunday	4:00- 5:00 p.m. 7:00-10:00 p.m.	7:00- 8:00 p.m. 9:00-10:00 p.m.	7:30-10:00 p.m.
Monday	7:30-10:00 p.m.	7:30-10:00 p.m.	7:30-10:00 p.m.
Tuesday	7:30-10:00 p.m.	7:30- 8:30 p.m. 9:30-10:00 p.m.	7:30-10:00 p.m.
Wednesday	7:30-10:00 p.m.	7:30-10:00 p.m.	7:30- 9:00 p.m.
Thursday	7:30-10:00 p.m.	7:30-10:00 p.m.	7:30-10:00 p.m.
Friday	7:30-10:00 p.m.	7:30-10:00 p.m.	7:30-10:00 p.m.
Saturday	9:00-11:00 a.m. 9:30-10:00 p.m.	9:00-11:00 a.m. 8:30-10:00 p.m.	9:00-11:00 a.m. 7:30-10:00 p.m.

News programs. variety shows. and network specials were excluded because they did not contain plots or story lines.

Within these samples. Gerbner found that:

—The general prevalence of violence did not change markedly between 1967 and 1969. The rate of violent episodes remained constant at about eight per hour.

—The nature of violence did change. Fatalities declined. and the proportion of leading characters engaged in violence or acting as killers declined. The former dropped from 73 percent to 64 percent: the latter from 19 to five percent. The consequence is that as many violent incidents occurred in 1969 as 1967. but a smaller proportion of characters were involved. and the violence was far less lethal.

—Violence increased from 1967 to 1969 in cartoons and comedies. These two program types are not mutually exclusive in Gerbner's classification system. Much of the increase in violence in comedies is attributable to the inclusion of cartoons in the comedy category.

—Cartoons were the most violent type of program. The number of cartoon programs increased. from 32 in 1967 to 38 in 1969. The percentage of these programs containing some violence increased from 94 percent in 1967 to 97 percent in 1969. Although the percentage of leading

characters involved in killing declined from 14 percent in 1967 to one percent in 1969, on the average 88 percent of leading characters in cartoons were involved in violence for the 1967-69 period.

—Whereas in noncartoon shows in 1969 the agent of violence was a human being in 78 percent of the cases, in cartoons this role was depicted as human in only 23 percent of the cases. Nature, animals, and accidents are the agents of violence in more than three-quarters of the cases.

Gerbner also tried to place the violence he observed into some social and moral context by looking at its time, place, and setting and by noting the kinds of people who engaged in violence and the kinds of people who were its victims. He found that:

—In 1969, law enforcement agents appeared in four percent of the cartoon episodes and in 19 percent of the noncartoon. When they did play a role in noncartoon episodes, law enforcement agents were involved in violence in 79 percent of the cases.

—Violence is more likely to take place in the past or the future (rather than in the present) and tends to be set in exotic, far-off, or unidentifiable places (rather than in surroundings familiar to viewers).

—Violence is most frequently committed by white middle- and upper- class males, unmarried and in the young adult or middle years.

—Most televised violence occurs between strangers or slight acquaintances.

Gerbner's study combines Saturday morning programming with dramatic programs in prime time evening hours. Barcus (1971) focused on Saturday morning programming in a content analysis using a sample of 19 hours broadcast in Boston by three network stations and one independent. He found:

—In regard to broad program format categories, that commercial and promotional messages accounted for approximately 19 percent of the time; that when programs were roughly classified either as entertainment or as information, entertainment accounted for 89 percent of the time; and that 62 percent of total content consisted of animation.

—In regard to violent content, that approximately three out of ten dramatic segments were "saturated" with violence; that 71 percent had at least one instance of human violence with or without the use of weapons; and that, although in 52 percent of the segments violence was directed at humans, in only four percent did this result in death or injury.

Qualitative aspects of violence portrayals

While these content analyses deal with the more readily quantifiable aspects of violence on television (e.g., How many acts? Who committed them? Where did the action take place?), they do not focus on the more qualitative aspects (e.g., Was the violent act related to character and plot development or was it gratuitous? How vivid or gory was the act

itself? What were the consequences?), which may well have a bearing on possible deleterious effects (see Heller and Polsky, 1971).

In this connection it should be noted that the National Association of Broadcasters Television Code, the self-regulatory instrument of the industry, has definite strictures on these more qualitative aspects of the presentation of violence. For example, the code stipulates: "Such subjects as violence and sex shall be presented without undue emphasis and only as required by plot development or character delineation. Crime should not be presented as attractive or as the solution to human problems and the inevitable retribution should be made clear." At another point the code states that "the detailed presentation of brutality or physical agony by sight or by sound are not permissible." Unfortunately, Gerbner's study does not indicate the extent to which these industry guidelines for mitigating possible negative effects of violent content have actually been achieved in current television programming.

POPULARITY OF VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

Violence, of course, has been portrayed in entertainment since the earliest dramas were sung by traveling musicians. Clark and Blankenburg's (1971) data on a variety of media—prime time television drama, movies, a family magazine, newspaper front pages, and television news —make it clear that violence appears regularly and frequently in all media. It has been a major component of American mass media since their inception.

Because of the crude measures used and the inherent differences between media, direct comparisons among media as to violent content are not feasible. However, since people report using television much more than other media, they are presumably exposed to more fictional violence on television than in any other medium.

Clark and Blankenburg (1971), using *TV Guide* synopses from 1953 to 1969 as their source of information, observed some tendency for the frequency of violence in prime time evening programs to peak approximately every four years. They found no evidence that such fluctuations were related either to national crime rates (a point to which we will return) or to Congressional or other prominent criticism of violence in television. They did find evidence that is consistent with the interpretation that televised violence fluctuates as a function of the efforts of broadcasters to satisfy public taste and achieve as large an audience as possible—a .53 correlation between percentage of programs classified as violent and mean Nielsen ratings for all evening programs and a .49 correlation between the average Nielsen rating of programs classified as violent in one year and the number of such programs broadcast in the following year. Thus, the years that are high in violence also tend to be high in

overall ratings, and new season program formats are likely to vary according to what was popular with audiences the previous year. The investigators report that the latest violence "peak" occurred in 1967.

Heavy viewers of televised violence

The remarkable popularity among the adult population of television drama that includes violence is a social reality that cannot be avoided. In order to study the audience size and some demographic characteristics of adult viewers of television violence, Israel and Robinson (1971) analyzed marketing research data collected by W. R. Simmons and Associates. Using data from 1968, 1969, and 1970, and employing a nationally projectable sample of respondents who kept viewing diaries for two weeks, Israel and Robinson classified as heavy viewers of "violent television" those who reported viewing 8.5 hours of programs classified as violent during the two-week period in 1969-70. (Six hours was the cutoff point in 1967; in 1968 it was 7.5 hours.) Approximately 12 percent of the males and 11 percent of the females qualified as heavy violence viewers on this criterion in 1969-70.

These heavy viewers account for only about one-third of the total audience for the programs classified as "violent." These figures, projected nationally, mean that more than one-tenth of American adults watch more than four hours a week of television violence. The heavy viewers of violence are disproportionately clustered among males over 50 years old and among males with less than a full high school education.

Crime statistics and televised violence

Clark and Blankenburg (1971) tested the hypothesis that crime statistics in real life might vary with the frequency of fictional crime and violence in television content. They obtained crime statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which had "recently adjusted" them for "greater reliability." The statistics showed, for example, that murder in the U.S. declined between the 1930s and the early 1960s, when it began to increase; in 1968, the most recent year for which data were reported, the murder rate had reached approximately the level of the 1930s.

The investigators found that the percentage of violent programs does not correlate with Uniform Crime Report data on violence in the U.S., on either a direct or a delayed basis.

In other instances, however, media portrayals of antisocial or aggressive behavior appear to be related to similar events in the real world. For example, Siegel (1969) noted that approximately five years ago, NBC aired a Rod Serling film called *The Doomsday Flight*. The film revolved around a character who had placed a bomb on an airliner and then repeatedly phoned the airline company giving "hints" about the placement of the bomb. Before the broadcast ended, one airline had received a bomb threat. Within 24 hours, four more threats were reported. By the

end of the following week, during which the previous threats had been reported by other media, a total of eight bomb threats had been telephoned to airline offices—a figure twice that recorded for the entire month preceding the broadcast.

In May 1971 *The Doomsday Flight* was rebroadcast in Australia. Subsequent events paralleled the plot of the film: several days after the broadcast, Qantas Airlines paid approximately $500,000 in ransom to protect 116 passengers aboard a flight to Hong Kong.

Bandura (1971) has suggested that the incidence of airline hijackings may be related to news coverage of such events. He points out that no incidents of hijacking were reported in the United States before 1961. A number of Cuban airliners, however, were hijacked from Havana to Miami during the 1957-60 period; these hijackings were given heavy media coverage. The first American plane was hijacked to Havana in 1961.

THE COMPLEXITY OF PROGRAMMING DECISIONS

That identifying and responding to general audience preferences is a major concern to broadcasters in planning programs is amply borne out by three sets of interviews with network personnel and with producers and writers of television programs (Baldwin and Lewis, 1971; Cantor, 1971; Gerbner, 1971a).

Although many among network personnel express interest in reducing violence in their programs, they feel constrained by the economic realities of broadcasting. In order to induce advertisers to finance programming, networks must draw large audiences with demographic characteristics attractive to advertisers. As both network officials and creators of programs see it, "action" is among the best, fastest, and easiest ways of attracting and keeping large audiences, and "action" is considered as almost synonymous with violence. This reality looms large and is a source of contention among both the creators of programs and the network officials who oversee and judge the programs.

A multitude of important factors and considerations—public opinion, artistic and creative concerns, economic competition, and many private psychological proclivities—impinge upon the small army of decision-makers who decide which programs will be broadcast. We can easily surmise that, under these circumstances, whatever programs are ultimately screened are not just the products of a rational, conscious process. As ideas are thrashed out and as the creative brainstorming conferences occur, judgments are made about "what they will approve upstairs," "what the public wants (likes)," "will the advertiser buy it," and "will this ruin my artistic reputation." Each of these questions, however, gives the individual who provides the answer an opportunity

to imagine that he *knows* the answer. Likewise, selective remembering and forgetting, unconscious self-serving, and just plain personal interest will bring about differences of opinion and conflicting interests. The decision-making process is complex, and the attempt to accommodate many viewpoints limits the creative freedom with which any single participant can work.

In the studies of television program regulation undertaken for this program (Baldwin and Lewis, 1971; Cantor, 1971), it is easy to see this kind of process at work. Persons at all levels of decision-making implement the conscious and unconscious notions referred to above, in their efforts to satisfy the many competing value-impositions on their work product. Though most of the people interviewed in these studies imagine they know why they do what they do, and think that they respond in rational ways, quite clearly there is a substantial amount of reaction to what "they" think and expect. "Their" views, however, may never rise to the tangible level where they can be accurately checked. We do not imply that this internal regulatory process is peculiar to the television industry; it is characteristic of any group's decision-making process. In light of the underlying psychological processes described above, the presence of a regulatory code and/or the tendency to imagine the attitudes of "those higher up," may cause such constriction of outlook that values like "freedom of speech" may be encroached upon.

The theory that television violence is encouraged and perhaps made inevitable by the competitive economic structure of the American broadcasting industry is given some support by a set of reports describing the structure and control of television in three other developed nations: Great Britain, Israel, and Sweden (Halloran and Croll, 1971; Shinar, 1971; Dahlgren, 1971). The television offerings of different nations are difficult to compare in a meaningful way; these studies, moreover, are preliminary, and they do not claim to make definitive comparisons. They do indicate, however, that when rough comparisons are made, the proportion of violence on American television is greater than that broadcast in any of the other three nations.

In the United States, public television—which is free of competitive restraints—is in its infancy. Its financial resouces (provided by government and private foundations) are very modest compared with commercial network budgets. Public television, however, represents a potential way of changing the balance of television content in directions other than those dictated by audience size.